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FORMER SALT NEGOTIATOR SHOWS DIFFERENT SIDE OF TALKS
BY JILL LAI, UPI BOOKS EDITOR

Months of negotiations can lead nowhere and perhaps few know this better than those who negotiate an agreement on strategic arms limitation, only to see the document die unratified.

"It's frustrating to reach an agreement and then not to have it ratified," said former U.S. SALT negotiator John Whitman, 58. "That's one of the reasons I resigned from the CIA."

Whitman was the CIA's representative to the SALT II talks from 1977 and 1979. He has written an intriguing novel, "Geneva Accord," (Crown, 278 pp., \$14.95) that presents a fascinating picture of the negotiations.

The former CIA analyst of Soviet affairs was a witness in congressional hearings on ratification of the treaty, which he described as "modest and positive."

Whitman doesn't feel overly optimistic about the success of the current SALT negotiations between the Reagan administration and the Soviet Union.

"I'm pessimistic about this cast of characters; but they profess a new devotion to it," he said. "We'll see. It seems as though we're idiots in the grip of idiocy, racing into new technology. It's demoralizing."

Whitman left the agency in 1980 after a 30-year career and is a social worker at the D.C. Institute of Mental Hygiene, a non-profit organization that charges its patients according to their ability to pay. He and his five children live in Falls Church, Va.

"It's such a different situation, completely opposite from the CIA bureaucracy. I work with individuals, on an emotional rather than a rational basis, where it's intuitive rather than logical," said Whitman. "I'd never go back."

Whitman's description in the novel of the SALT talks presents an aspect that the general public is unaware of -- that the real discussions take place on a one-on-one basis after the formal presentations at the plenary sessions.

In the novel, KGB agent Victor Smirnov and CIA representative George Inigo are paired off for discussions. Smirnov approaches Inigo with his idea to lead the talks to a successful end by telling the U.S. delegation Russia's fallback positions on each negotiating point -- in return for asylum.

Whitman thought it improbable that a high-ranking Russian would ever defect the way his character, Victor Smirnov, does in his novel "Geneva Accord." That is until he read Arkady Shevchenko's book "Breaking with Moscow."

"There are many parallels between Smirnov and Shevchenko," Whitman said. "They both suffered a lot of anguish in their decision to defect and both defected in place -- they remained in their job and relayed information. They jumped for safety. Both wives also elected to return to Russia."

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The author, who was born in Whiting, Ind., and grew up in Concord, Mass., wanted his novel to be as accurate as possible.

'I wrote it up to the edge of classification (classified material) for veracity and submitted it to the agency. They had five copies to distribute to the five subdivision, each of which picks a specialist to read it. I was worried about one sentence and when the manuscript came back, one sentence had been deleted,' Whitman said.

When Whitman first joined the agency, the CIA was still in its infancy. He thinks it now is a better organization.

'It's more professional. They understand the rules of evidence, of the need for documentation and they communicate with the government. There is more training,' he said.

'I also think the CIA has taken the heat for things a president may have ordered done,' he said, and added, 'They sometimes should have asked 'Have you read the Constitution lately?'

'The CIA should never get involved in domestic activity. For example, President Johnson wanted a survey of those with opinions opposed to the Vietnam War, particularly whether the students were under communist control.

'The agency came up with an answer Johnson didn't like: that there was no communist control. But the agency shouldn't have done it,' Whitman said.
'There have been repetitions of such requests but we have said no.'